Navy in Afghanistan

There we were …

The Problem

- Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan – 2009
- VAQ-134 Garudas, only Navy TACAIR SQD in AFG
- Joint customers were uninformed about the capabilities of EA-6B and EA applications.
  - High turnover between the Prowler squadrons made it difficult to connect with the customer
  - Ground unit EWOs' lack of knowledge led to inefficient employment of limited asset
- The TACSIT changed, significantly – Conventional Forces slow to recognize, resisted change.

CombatiPad

Asking the Question

- One TTP used by the previous squadron didn't make sense to use in AFG so VAQ-134 Tactics Officer LCDR Chris "TJ" Jason asked the Joint Warfare Analysis Center (JWAC) to figure out if this rule-of-thumb applied to the Afghan environment (Problem –ID)
- JWAC's recommendation was 180 degrees out from what previous squadron had been doing (Solution –ID)
- Adopted new TTP and knowledge to account for the unique AFG target sets and terrain (Solution –ID)

"You can't just do what the previous squadron did."

- LCDR Chris "TJ" Jason
VAQ-134

Challenging the Status Quo

- Counter-IED (C-IED) unit Combined Joint Task Force (CJTF) Paladin trained Army and Air Force Electronic Warfare Officers (EWOs) new to theater
- Resident Bagram Prowler squadron was invited to give a brief on EA-6B capabilities to each new class of EWOs (4-8 EWOs each class, 3 x month)
- Prowler canned brief was too technical, no BLUF, not useful for the customer – plus, the TACSIT CHANGED!
- LCDR Jason re-wrote brief to outline what Prowlers can and can't do for ground customers, incorporated recent feedback
- Shifted location of EWO training to squadron spaces – took ownership

VAQ-134

One of Our EWO Training Classes

Continuing to Communicate

- EWOs feedback through CJTF EWO found to be no or low value, low interest (Problem ID)
- Aircrew submitted post-mission feedback directly to the assigned EWO – high value, high interest (Solution ID)
- VAQ-134 maintained continuous feedback loop with all EWOs to enable continuous process improvement – Score!
- VAQ-134 provided expertise to EWOs and briefed their chains of command on Prowler capabilities – Score!
  - Assumption of interference made many Commanders skeptical of Prowlers as viable asset (uninformed leadership …)
  - Combined Joint Special Operations Task Force (CJSOTF) Joint

Efficient and Effective

- VAQ-134 executed record flight hours, HVT/HVI attrition objectives in a given month or deployment
  - Most hours flown in any month previously in AFG = 404
  - VAQ-134 flew 500-550 per month with 4 aircraft, 557 peak
- Flew more night ops
- Challenged Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) apportionment to meet SOF requirements – high resistance …in the face of facts!

Focus on Unit Morale

- VAQ-134 CO CDR David “DEKE” Slayton implemented a number of initiatives to keep his Sailors happy
  - Functional reconfiguration of workstations by division
  - Allowed Sailors to customize their front porches, roofs
  - Let his guys “heavily modify” an old Chevy blazer from DRMO, paint it gray and make it look like a Prowler on wheels a true “Squadron Vehicle”
  - Borrowed dogs from EOD team, and let his Sailors spend time with them
  - Volunteered to field test flight gear for PMA-202
    - New flight gear for the squadron– cost the squadron

Squadron Vehicle

Before

After

Keys to Success

CDR Slayton…

1. Had no preconceived notions about how to do things; challenged status quo, listened to SMEs
2. Regular IDF Attacks helped focus one's mind
3. Empowered his DHs and JOs, supported their initiatives and ideas, got out of their way!
4. Never afraid to ask the questions "Why?", "Can we do this better? A little differently?" & "what are the barriers"?

Keys to Success

LCDR Jason…

1. Not taking anything for granted: passdown from previous squadron is not gospel, keep searching for a better way.
2. Customer-focused training: what do these EWOs really need to know?
3. Continuous dialogue with supported units, good and bad feedback: always improving!

Case Study Contacts

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